

Marks of a Neurotic

Brittany Marie Ferguson

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By
Brittany Marie Ferguson
Master of Fine Arts

Herron School of Art and Design
IUPUI
Indiana University

Meredith Setser
Advisor

Lesley Baker
Committee Member

Patrick Kinsman
Committee Member

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Professor Valerie Eickmeier
Dean of Herron School of Art and Design

Date

Artist Statement

To know one's self, the "real self", without the distortion of an "idealized self" is quite a challenge in today's society. Based on personal beliefs, social values, childhood experiences, and learned cultural values, individuals are forced to navigate through life abiding by certain stipulations while also being encouraged to be an individual. Do we really know and understand who we are? Can we truly be comfortable with who we are as individuals? How does this affect our ability to interact with others? As a visual artist, my work has become a public display of internal conflicts due to past experiences that result in emotional traumas to the personal psyche. This emotional build up has led me to develop a body of work that not only expresses me as an artist, but it becomes a therapeutic tool in my characteristic makeup.

Our everyday decisions and choices are influenced by our upbringing as children. The ways in which we interact with others as adults comes from the knowledge and experiences we've learned throughout our childhood and adolescent days. Using my own experiences as a reference, the figures I portray, and the objects or imagery that interact with these characters deal with issues of identity, and how our identity can be drastically altered as a result of these experiences.

Putting Myself in the Work

I believe that to put yourself into your own work challenges you to become more aware of yourself as an artist and human being than to exclude yourself completely. I have a deeper connection and understanding to my work now that it is about my relationships and personal experiences because as they become publicly viewed, my

world is no longer safe and I become more aware of how others react to my personal beliefs. My work is driven by experiences from my own personal life and particularly focuses on how women, both physically and mentally, can feel fragile based on their beliefs, relationships, and social status. The work focuses heavily on how fragile the female psyche can become when the constant pursuit of acceptance by peers and lovers cause the figures to lose all sense of who they really are and what they stand for. In Karen Horney's writing of *Theory of the Self*, we all strive for self-actualization. We all have a double take of our self: the "real self" and the "ideal self." The "real self" being who and what we actually are and the "ideal" being the type of person that we feel required to portray in society.

The figures used in my work are an abstraction of me, taking on a neurotic psyche that envelops my world and exposing everything. In the work, the figures' bodies are not perfect, but expose the physical attributes that make them womanly, emphasizing and exaggerating particular areas key in identifying the figure as "female". As a woman, society tells me I should look a certain way, dress a certain way, and act a certain way, but I don't due to the way I was brought up as a kid, and from my own personal beliefs that defy social gender roles. I tend to live vicariously through the figures I create. They express the things I want to say; they expose the emotions that I tend to hide from public view that I feel make me look weak.

There is no physical interaction I have to have with my viewer, just the observation of the reaction between my figure and the viewer. I am interested in the way my figures are perceived, whether they are looked at objectively or subjectively. Can they be seen empathetically as a living, breathing creature with emotions, or will

they be cast as pleasurable figures to look at because they are nude and in sometimes-provocative poses?

A Personal Analysis

Psychoanalysis has become a principle factor in the creation of my figures. The theory as a whole emphasizes the importance of childhood experiences and how those experiences, or the lack of those experiences, can have a profound impact on an individual's psyche and their outlook on the world. The figure's constant struggle with her personality pertains primarily to the id. The id, as defined by Freud, is driven by internal and basic drives or needs and is typically instinctual, by means of hunger, thirst, the drive for sex, etc. It acts on the pleasure principle by seeking pleasure while avoiding any pain. It is impulsive and usually unaware of the repercussions of its actions. The figure's need for love and acceptance leads her to do things or think things without the morality of the situation given any contemplation. Freud also delves into the psychosexual development, in which my figure seems to be entrapped within the Genital Stage where the individual focuses on the psychological detachment and independence from the parents. The individual then becomes more concerned with gratifying themselves symbolically and intellectually by creating friendships, love relationships, as well as establishing family and adult responsibilities. My figure is then forced to face her self, recognize her absurdities, and deal with them no matter how painful it may be. The viewer is able to witness a transition from a battered psyche and hidden creature, to a figure becoming more and more aware of her "real self" and what possibilities open up when she exposes herself.

Exposing a part of the psyche that is very complex, I started using cutouts in my work to symbolize the complexities of emotions and the internal conflicts within myself. Each cutout represents a line of communication, a moment of emotion, a time frame encompassing an experience that resulted in some sort of emotional and psychological trauma within the figure. The cutouts seen within the work are representing a fragment, or glimpse at a moment within the figures' brain that triggered the pose or action that the figure makes in public view. The cutouts also imitate the sort of pattern in the tattoos that adorn the figure.

Karen Horney, a Neo-Freudian who studied neurosis and, while she agreed with many of Freud's theories, challenged his more homophobic and phallic-enviuous theories with her own. Her study on neurosis led her to believe that it is a continuous process, beginning primarily from the experiences as a child. My figure exhibits the need for affection and approval, as outlined in Horney's compliance category as self-effacement. Children who experience numerous difficulties with their parents tend to use this strategy as a coping mechanism, for they fear abandonment and the feeling of helplessness. This need for approval and affection plays well into adulthood, often looked to from the individual's peers. My figure seeks out a partner, a lover, in which to find this approval and affection, for this acceptance will miraculously cure all that ails the figure in her troublesome existence.

Understanding the Past

To understand where this frame of mind developed and stems from, you must take a look back at my upbringing. Growing up in a household where I was the only

child, in a family full of brothers and sisters, my mother and her mother became the two most important female figures in my life. I learned the “domestic” ways, while also being taught to be my own person and being a strong, independent woman who didn’t need a man to make her happy, or “complete.” This is not to say that the men in our family were undervalued, but they had to understand that they were marrying into a family of strong women who wouldn’t accept anything less than equality of their spouses.

My mother’s relationship has always been a special one for me. She and I have shared many experiences in which our personal identities and beliefs were scrutinized for the people we knew, loved, and associated with. We were never good enough, strong enough, or “Christian” enough to be lovingly welcomed into the arms of particular family members. My mother and I found solace in each other and she taught me what true family is, and that to be your own person is more important than anything. This view helped in my characteristic buildup of becoming an independent person. It helped me to see that I did not need a man to complete me, yet in the back of my mind I yearn for that companionship to the point that I make bad choices for myself that end in emotional trauma. Those emotions and choices become exposed when I put them into my work.

I learned that while it’s powerful to be your own person, some vulnerability is needed in order for the other person to feel equal to you. But for someone who gave up feeling vulnerable so that she’d never feel betrayed or scrutinized again, this idea of “letting go” had me in a bind of understanding what it means to be female, to be independent, and to be with someone; all together. This in turn, helped me to create the

figures in my work that portray the difficulties in life when emotions and mental understandings play a big role in our daily lives.

Stemming from the law enforcement role model behavior I acquired being the daughter and granddaughter of Sergeants, my way of getting through life solely relied on becoming independent. I have learned the hard way that independence does not necessarily mean strength, in the psyche view. Independence has lead me to a personal, and internal conflict that restricts my social interactions tremendously to the point that relationships, both of the friendly nature and that of a romantic status, become limited and sometimes inexistent. The figures in my work represent this isolation. The stereotypical gender roles claim that women are supposed to be demure, feminine, and submissive depending on the environment they are in. "Gender roles are differentiated in American culture according to workplace, leisure activities, dress, possessions, language, demeanor, reading material, college major, and even degree of sexual experience and pleasure," (Lindsey, pg. 54). Socialization processes, taught by both parent and school, helps the child to see the differences between boy and girl, and typically molds the child into an "acceptable" gendered individual. Later on in life, the individuals are responsible for themselves in being the "ideal" portrayal of their gender. However, when the individual displays uncharacteristic qualities of their gender, they are "risking social disapproval," (Lindsey, pg. 54). This clash of femininity and masculinity is described as being a part of the "androgynous" model where an individual exhibits traits of both feminine and masculine qualities. This model provides an alternative that allows acceptance of gender "inappropriate" behaviors," (Lindsey, pg. 73). My figures, though they do not visually display this clash of characteristics, their

insecurity of behaving in a socially unacceptable manner due to the gender roles taught to us in our childhood days, is emphasized by their posture. They are not confident in themselves and the way another perceives them; therefore they hide themselves. While they hide, they also use defense mechanisms to protect them from something possibly painful.

The Mental Process of Creation

My work has always been emotionally driven. I try to always present something that has a very powerful, emotional response that I feel is necessary to make public. The exposure to public viewing makes the experience and artwork that much more real and confrontational in a good way. I feel as though my public works become a visual journal for the world to see, and yet I find myself emotionally unconnected when it's placed in public. When creating the work, all my energy, all my emotions crash over me and I lose myself in the work. But when it's exhibited, for some reason I do not have the same feeling as when I was creating the work. It is as if I created the work to free myself of the inverted pain that I felt when revisiting those experiences that lead to the work. To understand the reasoning behind the figures and their demeanor, one must understand my past, my psyche, and my reasoning.

To have someone's gaze, and be held captive by it, emotionally and sometimes physically, is quite an emotional experience. To want to be gazed at, but to withhold or control what the viewer sees, becomes a psychoanalytical game between the viewer and the viewed. "As explained in the Lacan module on the structure of the psyche, that fantasy image of oneself can be filled by others who we may want to emulate in our

adult lives (love objects),” (Felluga). The gaze goes back to how exactly the audience will view the figure, objectively or subjectively. Distorting the view of the figure, or hiding parts of it makes it more alluring to the viewer, which then creates the subjective view, whereas showing the entire figure may lead to a more objective view because you can clearly see the female figure fully exposed. It will be completely up to the viewer.

To best depict a vulnerable and completely open figure, the work showcases a naked figure. Writer John Berger defines a naked person as a person without clothes and a nude to be a person whose nakedness is worn as a disguise. I personally relate rawness to nakedness, and so choose to use naked as a term for complete vulnerability and exposure. As an art student who has taken several drawing classes in which “nude” models were present for students to hone their skills at proportions and conveying form through light and shadow. The term “nude” became an academic or educated term, with no personality or life to the model. The late Lord Kenneth Clark, an art historian of the 20th, said about naked versus nude in his classic book from the 1950s, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, “Nude confers power; naked implies helplessness.” While I can see this point of view, I disagree for the reason that “nude” studies are directed to act or pose a certain way, whereas to be naked could mean having control while showing an innocence or vulnerability. To be naked should also be considered as having emotional or psychological ties to the word. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines both terms as “devoid of a natural or conventional covering.” The figures’ nakedness is not meant solely to represent her physical appearance and being comfortable in her skin, but it also represents the nakedness of her mind and her raw emotions that she is so used to hiding from the world. She is completely exposed, mind,

body, and soul. She's laying it all out for the world to see, in a way that frees her from her psychological confinement.

Combining the ideas of fragility and wanting to be "hunted", doted over and prized, I wanted a figure that exposes herself to the public as a form of honesty and strength, but poses in a submissive manner reflecting the child-like manner and fragility, or risk, of exposing yourself to someone you are emotionally and sexually drawn to. Her womanly body references her age range, but she still hides, or attempts to hide those parts in which she feels more vulnerable in exposing. The figure wears an animal skull that stands as a metaphor for her animalistic behaviors when she is around men she finds attractive. It also acts as a mask displaying her emotional state in different social situations. The figure changes her mask based on her emotional state at the time- feeling vulnerable, aggressive, and submissive, etc. The antlers are also changing, referencing humiliation or loss of self-control. Animals with antlers use them as tools for emitting dominance or at least equality. To lose them can be detrimental. For the figure, not having antlers disgraces her. The tattoos that adorn her body then become another tool she uses to convey her emotional state becoming a mystical creature that flaunts her colorful tattoos as a way to attract these men. Her body is a canvas of her experiences, both good and bad. The tattoos, like certain animals use colorful feathers or color-changing skin, are meant to attract while exposing a bit more about her.

Like animals, humans display their own type of camouflage in order to protect themselves from something possibly dangerous or painful, but it is not always something negative. Tattoos can be used as a barrier to the "ordinary" or "mundane".

Tattoos, in my case, become a narrative story for the audience to decipher for themselves. If I am going to be stared at, like an object, then I want you to focus on more than the physicality and fleshiness of my body, and read the tattoos like a visual journal or diary. The tattoos are my way of speaking to someone. Like a moth to a flame, people are instantly drawn, or deterred by the tattoos, but at one moment, they are instantly intrigued. It deflects any negative attention to the body, depending on the placement of the tattoo(s), and focuses on what the meaning is behind the tattoo. I use the body as a walking canvas, making it even more beautiful by adding color and line to it. The tattoos also stand in as timelines from a moment in the figures' life, or in reality, my own moment. Using flash art, traditional maritime imagery, and my own hand-drawn images, I created arm sleeves that depict an emotional journey that I have experienced.

As part of my work, I take process photos documenting the progress of work I put into each piece. I have found that Instagram, a popular smartphone application, is the best way to not only document, but also share with others without revealing everything. I yet again have control of what my viewers see. The process of showing only parts of the figure refers back to the gaze. I manipulate the visual, the spatial, and the temporal, while editing how much the viewer sees, the photographic codes create a window or world where the object is viewed. While both male and female viewers are commenting on the look of the figure, being subjective based on their cultural identities they've been accustomed to. However, a notable difference is visible between the sexes. Female viewers typically comment on the overall beauty and realness of the figure. There is a compassionate and sympathetic tone in their comments, while the male viewers are more assertive in their sexual views. Both ways of looking at the figure are

valid and only prove the point that women will always be judged based on their looks, not always by what they bring to the table.

Thesis Exhibition

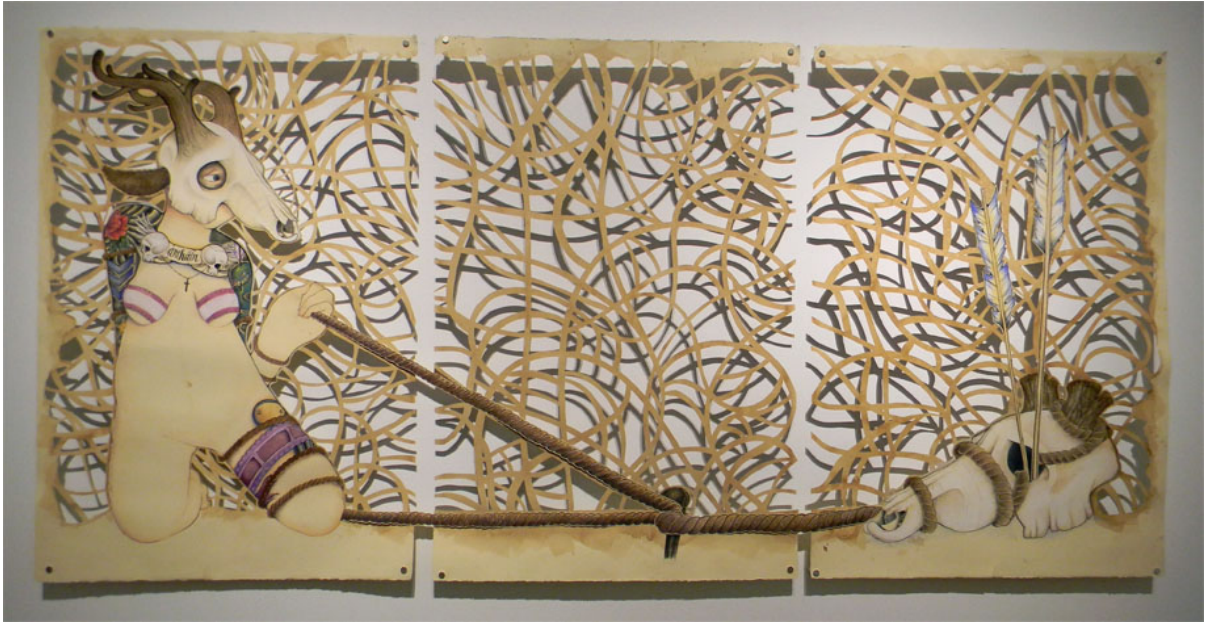
Upon entering the gallery space, viewers are instantly drawn to the hand-painted figure sitting roughly sixteen feet high on the middle of the wall. Sketch lines still visible beneath the black graphic line illustrate my creative process. I find that including my processes, visually, adds to the dimension of the figure; the figure as a living creature is much a work in progress as the sketches it takes to create a visually pleasing piece of art. Much to be expected, “illustrative” was the word used to describe the hand-painted figure. I have embraced this term, as it pertains to the use of lines and graphic style. Back then I cringed at the thought of my work being doled out as “illustrative” because in my head I could only picture comic books. My interest and research into tattoos, and the graphic quality many of them attained led me to understand that illustrative can be a positive look depending on the style of drawing the artist possesses.

To the left and right of the figure are Prismacolor colored pencil drawings of the figure in various poses. Each piece hangs about two and half inches away from the wall in order for the intricate, organic-like cutouts of the background to cast sharp shadows on the wall behind the pieces, again, adding dimension to the piece.

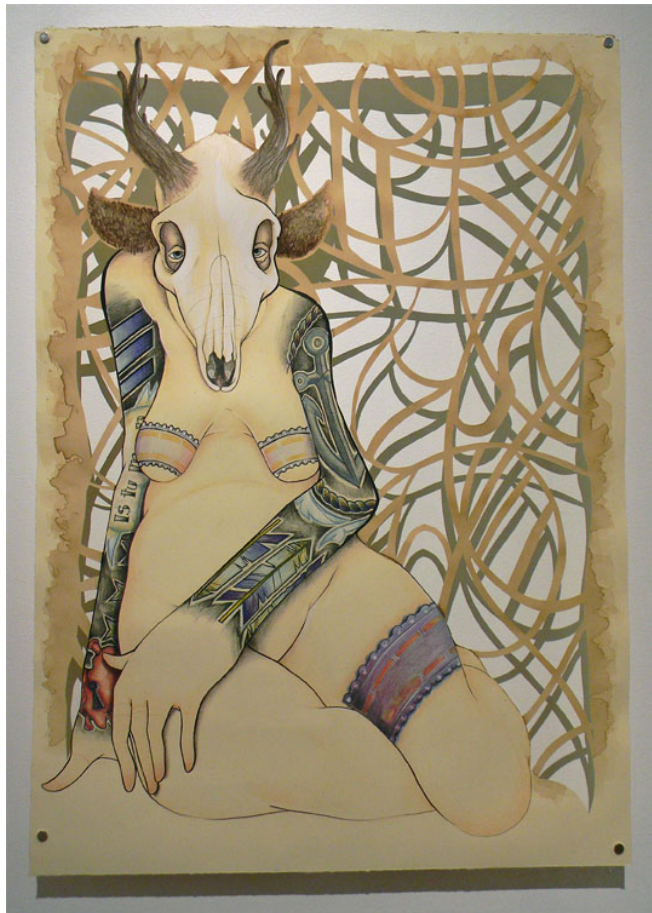
In the middle of the gallery are two floor pedestals that display the ceramic skulls that have been hand-painted with tattoo designs. Each skull is roughly a foot long and eight to ten inches wide. Displaying the skulls in the middle of the gallery space and

on the floor, I hoped for the viewer to take in the experience as if they were seeing them in the dirt at an excavation, as though they had just been dug up and put on display.

The responses from viewers were overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. One viewer in particular was so emotionally moved by the pieces, she introduced herself with tears in her eyes. The viewers recognized that the figure was hiding from something, or had gone through an emotional event that led her to feel naked and exposed, while confronting her fears. Without telling the viewer specifically what the work was dealing with, the viewers' understood and found a relatable element in the work. They felt empathy.



"Tug of War", Prismacolor pencil, 90"x44", 2013



"Captivated", Prismacolor pencil, 30"x42", 2013



"Always Fighting", Prismacolor pencil, 22"x30", 2013



"Reflection", Prismacolor pencil, 30"x22", 2013



"Unbound", Prismacolor pencil, 30"x44", 2013



"Tattooed Skull", Stoneware, underglaze, 2013



"Tattooed Skull", Stoneware, underglaze, 2013



"Tattooed Skull", Stoneware, underglaze, 2013



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